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DE RUEHRO #0535/01 0751722

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7435

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0350

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 4326

RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 2246

RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 8472

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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2845

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000535

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2007

TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO EUN UNSC RU IT

SUBJECT: PRODI/PUTIN - ITALIANS CLAIM "FULL HARMONY" WITH RUSSIA

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Classified By: Classified by Acting Political Minister Counselor Jonathan R Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

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¶1. (C) Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Italy on March 13 and 14 for his fourth bilateral with PM Prodi in ten months. Putin and Prodi met for three-hours over dinner March 13, and traveled to the Adriatic port city of Bari along with several ministers for a largely economic summit March 14. In the press conference after the Prodi-Putin meeting, Prodi called the summit a testament of the strategic partnership between Italy and Russia and declared that the two countries shared close or identical positions on nearly every international issue. An advisor to Prodi described the summit as an enormous success and declared it an important step in bringing Russia forward into the ranks of countries that want to use multilateralism and consensus to solve international crises. Representatives of the MFA, however, questioned the basis for the PM's giddiness and insisted that Italy differs with Russia on several significant points. Public statements made raise our concerns over GOI positions in the UNSC, on Kosovo, Iran, Missile Defense and Afghanistan. End summary.

¶2. (C) On March 13 and 14, Russian president Putin visited Italy for a bilateral summit. The summit focused largely on economic and commercial issues (septel), but gave Putin a broad platform to discuss political issues. Putin met briefly on the March 13 with President Napolitano and visited the Vatican before holding a three hour dinner meeting with PM Prodi. According to a diplomatic advisor to Prodi, attendance at the dinner was tightly restricted but Prodi and Putin emerged convinced that Russia and Italy could become strategic partners on security, energy, and trade. According to the source, Putin and Prodi were "in full agreement" on both the way forward and the preferred outcome on Iran. Kosovo and Afghanistan, they agreed, required international consensus, a multilateral approach (UN), and greater diplomatic engagement with states and parties that have been previously ignored. The press played particular attention to Prodi's call for close Russian-Italian cooperation in the UNSC. MFA sources, however, worked hard to play down Prodi's giddiness and the level of political agreement on Kosovo,

Afghanistan and Iran and insisted that, while Prodi leads the government, D'Alema is fully implementing Italy's foreign policy in close coordination with its allies. Comment: Be that as it may, D'Alema's public statements after his parallel bilateral with Russian FM Lavrov do not give cause for reassurance.

Kosovo: Mixed Messages on Ahtisaari Plan

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¶ 13. (C) Ruggiero Corrias, a diplomatic advisor to Prodi, told poloffs that Prodi and Putin agreed that a negotiated settlement to the Kosovo status issue was the preferred outcome and cited Belgrade and Pristina's attendance at the most recent Vienna talks as a major step forward. He stated that the EU and US incentives could convince Belgrade to be more constructive in finding an acceptable negotiated settlement. (He was apparently unaware that Serbia had been granted PfP and SAA.) When asked if D'Alema's statement that Russia and Italy agreed to insist on acceptance by the two sides, even if it comes after the Ahtisaari report meant that Prodi believed that Ahtisaari's plan and the current timetable for a discussion on Kosovo could be abandoned, Corrias demurred saying he was not an expert on the issue.

¶ 14. (C) The next day, Raimondo De Cardona, Director of the MFA Balkans Office, told poloff that comments to the press notwithstanding, D'Alema expressed significant differences of opinion to Russian FM Lavrov on the Kosovo issue. D'Alema rejected any idea that a plan that does not have the full support of Belgrade is unacceptable.

Iraq/Afghanistan: No simple military solution

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¶ 15. (C) Corrias stated that Prodi and Putin agreed that neither Iraq nor Afghanistan could be resolved by force and a

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comprehensive political and reconstruction effort was needed. Additionally, Syria and Iran needed to be drawn into the discussion on Iraq. Prodi publicly supported the idea of hosting an Afghanistan peace conference "even if there are objections in Washington", and asserted to the press that the Kremlin was fully on board with the idea. MFA contacts continue to insist that although Italy continues to plan a Rule of Law conference, a broad peace conference is highly unlikely - even in D'Alema's view.

Missile Defense: Need to Consult Russia

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¶ 16. (C) According to Corrias, Putin and Prodi did not discuss Missile Defense. Putin and Lavrov, however, reiterated their opposition to European MD. D'Alema added that MD needed to be discussed at the EU and NATO level, not bilaterally. In a subsequent conversation, MFA NATO Office Director Minister Gianni Bardini assured A/PolMC that the minister subsequently had been briefed that Missile Defense was being discussed at NATO, including with the Russians, and had been for the last year.

Iran: Sanctions must be targeted, gradual

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¶ 17. (C) Corrias told poloffs that Russia is equally concerned about the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran and believed that this concern, not a contractual dispute, was the ultimate motivation for Russian unwillingness to move forward on supplying the Bushehr nuclear plant. Prodi and Putin agreed that any new sanctions must be targeted against the individuals and institutions that are engaged in the enrichment process. Nevertheless, both Putin and Prodi agreed that other options, including continued engagement and diplomatic pressure, should be exhausted before resorting to additional sanctions.

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